

*Fuzzy-Wuzzy Devils:  
Mass Media and the Bougainville Crisis*

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Francis Ona nem bilong em nau long dispela taim i save kamap long nius pepa, radio na tv long dispela kantri bilong yumi PNG na tu long wol. Nogat planti man na meri oli save long Francis Ona bipo, nau long PNG ol liklik pikinini, bikpela man, meri, ol lapun, ai pas tasol ol save long nem bilong Francis Ona.<sup>1</sup>

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The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Office of Information, charged in 1978 with reformulating government communication policy, characterized the mass media as “invaluable . . . for communication and information of a balanced nature conducive to national unity and democratic progress” (IRC 1979, 78). However, it admitted the country had “never formulated a theoretical foundation for its communication activities and has experienced frustration in communication servicing, planning and assessing” (ibid, 81). A decade later this frustration escalated to anger when a Bougainvillean juggernaut by the name of Francis Ona began making headlines in what has come to be known as the Bougainville crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Ona’s public career began relatively uneventfully. In March 1988 the university-educated father of five was elected spokesperson for a group of disenfranchised landowners at the Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) mine in Panguna. Over the next eight months this group, known as the “new” Panguna Landowners Association (PLA),<sup>3</sup> attempted to pressure BCL and the national government for increased compensation and better living conditions in the mine site area, with little success. Then, in

November 1988, one faction of the new PLA led by Ona turned to industrial terrorism to demonstrate their resolve. Sporadic sabotage over the next two months sent politicians and mining executives scrambling to the negotiating table, but Ona—by now a folk hero on Bougainville—refused to negotiate or surrender. In late January 1989 a curfew was placed on urban centers and villages in the mine area and riot police were ordered in. Within days the PLA took them on in the mountainous Kongara region, but as a new entity, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA).

How could a simple compensation dispute coalesce so quickly into a revolution? Did this “chance event . . . change the way men think about themselves and others, or provoke them to express ideas they had previously suppressed” (Nelson 1974, 242)? Questions such as these have been explored in depth elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> but a recurrent theme in analyses concerns the manner in which Bougainvillean autonomy has been subsumed by a parade of foreign powers—Germany, Australia, Japan—up to and including neocolonial integration within the independent nation of Papua New Guinea. Bougainville’s geographic and cultural links are with the western Solomon Islands, and its distinctively black population of approximately one hundred fifty thousand perceives itself as a real minority within the greater “redskin” PNG population of four million. Bougainvilleans believe national government policies discriminate against them because of this, with the pursuit of justice an ongoing struggle. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army is the latest expression of that belief.

After the initial attacks on BCL property, the national government moved quickly toward containment, fearing the spread of factionalism to other parts of the country. The media were to play an integral part in this strategy by promoting national unity, publicizing government initiatives, and maintaining the appearance of control. That the government found the media less and less successful in these tasks is due partly to the nature of the events as they unfolded, as well as to unrealistic expectations concerning the media process itself. This paper looks at that process from a number of perspectives in an effort to map its dynamism, its limitations, and its reflection of PNG society.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEAN MEDIA

Papua New Guinea boasts a relatively wide range of mass media in comparison with other nations in the independent Pacific. The National

Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is the wholly owned government radio broadcaster. It operates two national services, Karai and Kalang, and a network of nineteen provincial stations, Kundu, all headquartered in Port Moresby. No independently owned radio station yet exists in the country, though such stations would be possible under existing legislation (Henshall 1989). Radio is popularly regarded as the most effective medium for information and education in a preliterate society such as Papua New Guinea, although a recent inquiry into broadcasting (including television) identified a number of areas in which its quality could be improved (BIB 1987). However, radio remains the sole mass medium available to the bulk of the population.

The single television station, EM-TV, has been wholly owned by National Nine Network (Australia) since late 1990 (Taylor 1991). It, too, is based in Port Moresby and serves the provincial urban centers of Goroka, Lae, Mount Hagen, Rabaul, and Madang. Videotaped programming is also sent to the Ok Tedi mining towns of Tabubil and Kiunga, and to Wau and Bulolo for broadcast on the PNG Forest Products cable system. A half-hour of news is broadcast each day in the capital, then recorded on videotape and flown to the provinces for broadcast the next day. Otherwise, the station relies heavily on imported programming to make up the approximately twelve broadcast hours each day. This is not unusual in the Pacific because of the high cost of local production and the lack of technical skills.

Several newspapers are also available to complement the broadcast media. The *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* publishes in English five days a week and has an audited circulation of approximately 35,000. The majority shareholding is held by Rupert Murdoch's Herald and Weekly Times Ltd (62.5%), with other private investors in Papua New Guinea (27.5%) and Australia (10%) holding the remaining shares (Henshall 1989). It is headquartered in Port Moresby and maintains offices in Lae, Mount Hagen, and Rabaul.

A second daily newspaper, the *Niugini Nius*, published during much of the crisis. Owned by expatriate businessman Dennis Buchanan, it closed in March 1990 after a dispute with the PNG government over work permits for its staff. It too was headquartered in Port Moresby with offices in Lae and Rabaul, and in Goroka, the headquarters of Buchanan's domestic airline, Talair. Its unaudited circulation was 15,000 (Solomon 1989).

Two weeklies are published by Word Publishing, owned by the Catho-

lic (60%), Evangelical Lutheran (20%), Anglican (10%), and United (10%) churches (Walcot 1984). The *Times of Papua New Guinea* is published each Thursday in English and has a circulation of approximately 9000. Considered one of the best newspapers in the South Pacific, it is widely read by the more highly educated and active members of PNG society. *Wantok*, on the other hand, targets a more rural readership and uses the lingua franca Tok Pisin for publication. It has a circulation of 15,000.

The single example of an independent provincial press<sup>5</sup> in Papua New Guinea is the *Arawa Bulletin* of Bougainville founded in 1971 by a group of BCL employees and handed over in trust to the Bougainville community in the late 1970s. The trust is administered by a board representing BCL; national, provincial, and local governments; business; and other community groups. The board appoints the managing editor and has fiscal responsibility, but the managing editor retains full editorial control. Between 4000 and 5000 copies were published weekly, in English and Tok Pisin, before publication was suspended when security forces finally withdrew from the province in March 1990. It employed between two and four journalists and was distributed by air to all provincial subcenters.

In his proposal for a PNG news agency, University of Papua New Guinea Journalism Lecturer Peter Henshall found that the range of media available, while great compared with other Pacific Island nations, belied its focus on Port Moresby (1989). The four "national" papers all have limited circulation outside the National Capital District (NCD) and feature limited provincial coverage. In the *Post-Courier* and *Times* provincial news sources make up a fraction over one-fourth of the total, while NCD coverage averages 43 percent (Henshall 1989). *Wantok* is the exception, with nearly half its news originating in the provinces, and shows the success of Word Publishing efforts to set up a provincial "stringer" network. Yet, the fact that the network is not used to the same extent by the *Times* reinforces the idea that the primary audience of the *Times* resides in Port Moresby.

The amount of space given to provincial stories shows a similar pattern. When Henshall measured reports about the nineteen provinces and the NCD, he found the NCD topped the table with 57.45 percent of coverage, distantly followed by Morobe with 9.64 percent. Their capitals, Port Moresby and Lae, represent the two largest markets in the country.<sup>6</sup> Broadcast news analysis revealed similar patterns, though government,



education, justice, and capital works departments—all prime news sources—are significantly decentralized to the provinces (Henshall 1989).

The focus on Port Moresby can be traced in part to the fact that most working journalists are based there.<sup>7</sup> Although this is understandable because of financial limitations on media organizations, it leads unfortunately to a highly centralized and somewhat incestuous media system. Henshall argued that the reason little news came from the provinces was that journalism skills were scarce “out there” (1989). Although there may be some truth in this, it ignores the fact that the *Arawa Bulletin* published between five and eight pages of provincial news weekly and was used regularly as a source by Radio North Solomons, the NBC provincial station on Bougainville. Also, in the mid 1980s, *Arawa Bulletin* reporters were encouraged to freelance for the capital city press with little success. Both the *Post-Courier* and Word Publishing papers were generally uninterested unless they could “break” the story. This myopic focus on the capital has serious consequences in a decentralized and evolving political system such as Papua New Guinea’s, with developments on Bougainville a case in point.<sup>8</sup>

## DISCOURSE VERSUS REALITY

The crisis effectively had two fronts—the skirmish on the ground and the struggle over public opinion in the media. Although this is common in the West, it is an important and unusual exception to media policy in the Pacific. Island governments believe media to be powerful agents of change. They base this belief on research out of North America indicating traditional societies are very receptive to Western forms of mass communication (Lerner 1958; Pye 1963; Schramm 1964). As a result nearly all broadcast stations and many newspapers are government owned, with ideological competition in those media limited to statements made by the opposition.

Studies conducted in Western societies, however, found media to exert a more limited influence. “Communication research strongly indicates that persuasive mass communication is in general more likely to reinforce the existing opinions of its audience than it is to change such opinions” (Klapper 1960, quoted in Tunstall 1970, 22). The findings from these studies showed that people first of all selectively exposed themselves to mediated information consonant with their worldview, and then inter-

preted these messages according to "existing structures of social relationships and systems of culture and belief" (McQuail 1977, 73). Nash and Ogan, however, provide evidence that this distinction between modern and traditional societies is somewhat dubious. They found news of the 1972 Rovin-Moini murders<sup>9</sup> was also interpreted by the Nagovisi and Nasioi people of central Bougainville "in ways that fit preexisting attitudes and indeed confirmed them" (Nash and Ogan 1990, 10).

During the ongoing crisis the national government's fundamental position has been to preserve national unity, and communication policy initially focused on persuasive appeals to that effect. However, this agenda is problematic, derived as it is from colonial history and compromised by the lack of a basic commonality, such as shared language, culture, religion, or education (Bonney 1986). The ephemeral nature of the nationalist agenda is exacerbated in the case of Bougainville, whose people are distinguished from all other ethnic groups in Papua New Guinea on the basis of their unique skin color (Nash and Ogan 1990). Partly for this reason Bougainvillean-style ethnonationalism has been an integral part of the Bougainvillean identity since the late 1950s (Ryan 1969).<sup>10</sup> Though this nationalism was contained most recently in the late 1970s through the institution of provincial government, history shows it quick to reassert itself when Bougainvilleans believe themselves oppressed. In his press statements, Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu chose to ignore rather than explore this fundamental social reality—"We must not let a small minority destroy these great opportunities for the people of any part of our nation. . . . We are one people, one nation, and we have one future—a shared future which will bring greater prosperity and opportunity for all our people" (AB, 14 Apr 1989).

The nationalist rhetoric resonated with the majority of Papua New Guineans, whose solidarity was no doubt caused in part by the widespread stereotype of Bougainvilleans as a self-serving people.<sup>11</sup> "Unity must also be preached through the national media—radio, television and Press—in order to make our four million people aware of their responsibility to nationhood" (PNGPC, 21 Apr 1989).

On Bougainville, however, people were facing the reality of repeated abuse at the hands of the security forces. Although most Bougainvilleans conceded, if not actively supported, the integrity of the state of Papua New Guinea in the early stages of the crisis, the unpunished harassment of women, children, and the elderly provided a very tangible yardstick against which nationalist rhetoric could be measured. The national gov-

ernment had assured the Bougainvilleans it would "do everything possible to ensure the security forces use these powers responsibly" (Namaliu 1989). The fact that the government subsequently failed even to admit there was a problem caused Bougainvilleans to regard other news reports of government initiatives or successes with suspicion. A provincial government media liaison officer complained, "We were really frustrated in our progress by the action of the security forces. They really worked against the government trying to gain the people's confidence [through awareness campaigns], and ill-feeling was created" (Tapi 1989).

This "ill-feeling" was distilled into secessionism according to "existing systems of culture and belief" and spread throughout Bougainville via interpersonal media, such as rumor, two-way radios, faxes, even tee-shirts and church pulpits (Spriggs 1990), in much the same way mullahs in Iran distributed cassettes broadcast over mosque loudspeakers to mobilize the Iranian population toward revolution in the mid 1970s (Tehranian 1979). The national government, apparently oblivious to the loss in its credibility, persisted in a rhetorical media discourse that only worked to entrench opinions it had hoped to eradicate.

## NEWS AS CONSTRUCTED REALITY

In addition to highlighting the limitations of the mass media in convincing people day is night, coverage of the unfolding events on Bougainville provided examples of bias inherent in any Western-modeled media system. Objectivity, for example, is a widely regarded professional value, yet many studies of Western media detail ideological, organizational, and functional constraints on "objective" depictions of events in the news.

Ideologically, mass media have been found to "favour the institutionalised conventions of liberal democratic society and . . . reject (or treat as non-existent) those groups or individuals who either do not conform to, or appear to challenge, the established system" (McColl 1980, 425-426). This institutional bias allowed the national press, particularly in the early stage of conflict, to accept the government view that the situation in Panguna was an atomistic law-and-order problem, and kept them a step behind in assessing the extent of secessionist developments later on. This bias is also a factor behind the reliance on pejorative, as opposed to neutral, language in crisis coverage, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

Organizational constraints on the Australian media in particular

(PNG's model) have been explored by Henningham (1988), Tiffen (1989), and Edgar (1979) among others. They argue that the media are inherently conservative and supportive of industrial capitalism as a result of the diversified commercial interests of media proprietors and their political patrons. Journalists become socialized to these proprietorial interests by learning to conform with editorial policies that are often vaguely expressed, so as not to compromise the professional myth of objectivity (Breed 1954). Carey (1969) found this kind of socialization also present in the relationship between journalists and their sources, with reporters gradually internalizing the attitudes and expectations of the government and its agenda.

Functional or technical constraints, such as those imposed by deadlines, or by the space, time, and money available to cover an event, further contribute to the distortion and packaging of reality as "news" (Henningham 1988). The resulting bias can take a number of forms—"source bias, unbalanced presentation of controversial issues, emphasis on the exceptional event rather than the process or context, the frequent use of packaged formula, selection and omission of information, and quite often a reliance on partisan sources such as official communiques, press releases, speeches and interviews with leaders" (Peh and Melkote 1990, 1).

In Papua New Guinea prior to the crisis, the reliance on partisan sources was by far the most common institutional bias. Many "news" reports were often press releases with the occasional "he said" inserted into copy. Though this kind of respect for leadership is a widely accepted cultural value in Papua New Guinea, it is not uniquely Melanesian. Similar patterns of reporting are common in the US small-town and community press (Janowitz 1952). Like the PNG press, these papers were also found to emphasize consensus, promote local traditions and identity, and avoid controversy except when it related to another municipality. In national press crisis coverage, Bougainville effectively became that "other" municipality.

On Bougainville itself the provincial press immediately recognized landowner discord in the mine site area as newsworthy, covering the first official meeting of the new PLA, BCL, and the national and provincial governments. The *Arawa Bulletin* reported that fifty members of the PLA discussed "demands for increased compensation, better housing and conditions" (15 Apr 1988). The story noted the landowners were represented by their "newly-elected committee," with Perpetua Serero<sup>12</sup> as chair and

Francis Ona as spokesperson. By late July full-page features about the negotiations, demands, and PLA leadership struggle were appearing each week, competing successfully for space with coverage of the provincial election, Operation Mekim Save,<sup>13</sup> and other major events. Community interest in the topic was high, though opinion varied, as reflected in letters to the editor. However, national government and company complacency was also apparent. Only when violence threatened did the negotiators take the PLA at all seriously—on one occasion landowner occupation of the mine site was averted by a “last minute” visit by Minerals and Energy Minister Patterson Lowa (AB, 5 Aug 1988). Yet, over the next three months landowners persevered with nonviolent activism, including awareness campaigns and letters to the editor, the occupation of the Road Mine Tailings Lease Trust Fund offices, peaceful demonstrations at provincial government headquarters, and lobbying for an environmental study on the Jaba River, all extensively covered by the *Arawa Bulletin* (19, 26 Aug 1988, 1, 9 Sept 1988, 11 Nov 1988).

The PLA finally caught the attention of the national press when it embarked on its campaign of industrial terrorism in late November 1988. Bougainvilleans were then able to read about the events in Panguna from two perspectives, national and provincial. The national dailies, in particular, focused on the law-and-order angle. The *Post-Courier* reported the theft of explosives from the BCL magazine on 22 November and described the landowners as unpredictable gang members operating in a “volatile situation.” In contrast, the *Arawa Bulletin* report of the incident focused on the anonymous caller who warned the premier that four targets were ready to be blasted. That story also noted reports of similar thefts in April that year (AB, 25 Nov 1988),<sup>14</sup> highlighting PLA deliberation and planning.

Controversial and emotive language became more entrenched in subsequent national daily reports with the landowners referred to as “criminals,” “saboteurs,” and “gangsters who use . . . the code names Rambo 1, 2, 3, and 4” (PNGPC, 5 Dec 1988, 2). Three months into the conflict and perturbed by the continuing bias in presentation, former media executive Carolus Ketsimur, himself a Bougainvillean, complained:

Mr. Siaguru questions the actions of the Panguna landowners and the Defence Force soldiers and admonishes the two groups for taking the law into their own hands. In doing so, however, he describes the landowners as a “[b]and of brigands” while the soldiers are described as . . . “our soldiers.” . . . Nobody

wants to know the “brigands,” “rebels,” “terrorists” or whatever else the Panguna landowners have been described as in the press. (PNGPC, 20 Feb 1989, 11)

He also noted that contextual information was being selectively applied: “No theory is advanced as to why the landowners took the action they did and there’s no suggestion that they were as angry and frustrated as the soldiers. In fact, the two paragraphs on the Panguna landowners action didn’t seem to have much to do with the rest of the article. They seem to have been put in there just to have yet another swipe at the landowners” (ibid).

Ona refused to surrender during the January 1989 ceasefire, and riot police were soon dispatched in a “mopping up” operation. The national press, under headlines such as “Surrender or die,” saw it as a Papua New Guinean *Apocalypse Now*, with Francis Ona as Marlon Brando in black-face.

Fully-armed riot squad police are set to go into the jungles in search of militant Panguna landowner Francis Ona and his group of supporters. The police are armed with sub-machine guns, semi-automatic AR15 rifles, pistols, shotguns and tear-gas guns and cannisters. They will begin their manhunt either tomorrow or Friday depending on finalisation of plans. (PNGPC, 25 Jan 1989, 2)

The infamous Francis Ona, who forced the imposition of the curfew with his violent acts against Bougainville Copper Limited, is still in hiding in the jungles with his small group of supporters. (PNGPC, 31 Jan 1989, 3)

The positioning of the landowners as anarchists was exacerbated by the rise in rascalism, the *sekonhan BRA*, which accompanied the crisis and whose relationship to the *BRA tru* was blurred in the national press. In a March 1989 *Arawa Bulletin* report, Ona clearly identified the *sekonhan BRA* as a threat to the movement. He blamed Pakia and Parakake village youths for “terrorising innocent people since the present crisis took effect in November 1988” and warned the ringleader, a young relative of old PLA board chairman Severinus Ampaoi, not to “take advantage of his [Ona’s] group’s struggle over genuine issues” (AB, 3 Mar 1989).<sup>15</sup> Yet, the distinction between the two quite separate groups was never clarified in Port Moresby-based media reports. This imbued the PLA with a criminal character derived from the rascal groups, and set Ona up for censure over his inability to control their activities.

This criticism, a continuing theme in coverage, overlooked the fact that organized rascalism has long been a thorn in the side of legitimate provincial leadership. Although rarely approaching the situation in Port Moresby and Lae, criminal activity on Bougainville reached unacceptable levels in the urban areas in early 1988, forcing premier Kabui to resort to Operation Mekim Save. But the special operation caught few real rascals, and, during the state of emergency the following year, security forces failed to perform any better. During the blockade, criticism over Ona's failure in this regard reached extraordinary heights. He was expected not only to succeed where the disciplined forces and legitimate governments had not, but to do it in the face of the infrastructural and communications obstacles that existed in the province following the withdrawal of government services. The support this kind of criticism provided for continued military intervention should not be discounted.

These kinds of institutional biases reflect, in part, deep-seated social biases more clearly seen in the media's handling of ethnic disruption in the province four months into the uprising. In March 1988, twenty-two-year-old Bougainvillean Clement Kavuna died of brain damage after being picked up by the PNG police riot squad for questioning. According to police, Kavuna was injured after he jumped from a moving police vehicle in an escape attempt. Relatives insisted he fell while being beaten by drunken police in the back of the vehicle (*AB*, 17 Mar 1988). The same week, thirty-two-year-old Bougainvillean Deborah Raboni allegedly was axed in her garden by a Papua New Guinean plantation worker. In reprisal for these deaths, a group of Bougainvilleans armed with automatic weapons opened fire on a group of Papua New Guinean plantation workers the following week (*PNGPC*, 21 Mar 1988). Two workers died and three were seriously injured. These events inflamed long-standing tensions between blackskin Bougainvilleans and redskin Papua New Guineans and were followed by widespread rioting by Papua New Guineans and their mass exodus from the province.

Nash and Ogan describe how Bougainvillean reaction to the Raboni murder in particular mirrored attitudes expressed after the Rovin-Moini incident: "Once again Bougainvilleans perceived 'redskins' acting out their primitive, savage nature, with a peaceful black-skinned woman as victim" (1990, 12). Few Bougainvilleans, however, are employed in the national media. Papua New Guinean dominance there reflects its proportional dominance in the national population. "Reporting is not simply a matter



of collecting facts, whether about a race riot or about anything else. Facts do not exist on their own but are located within wide-ranging sets of assumptions, and which facts are thought to be relevant to a story depends on which sorts of assumptions are held" (Braham 1982).

The national press reacted with hysteria, running front-page headlines such as "Bougainville comes to a standstill: Rumored rampage forces shops, schools and banks to close" (*PNGPC*, 21 Mar 1989, 1). Though that report ostensibly dealt with unexpected peace, the theme of interethnic violence was stressed: "There was no rampage but all shops, commercial banks, business houses and government offices were shut in fear of a rampage by non-Bougainvilleans seeking vengeance over the *merciless* slaying of five Western Highlanders in their Aropa Plantation shed last Friday" (*ibid*, emphasis added). Similarly, in Australia, the notion of violence found its way into mainstream media coverage of the peaceful protest by Aboriginal people during the 1988 bicentennial celebrations: "White authorities have prepared for anything from violent riots to sabotage and bombings" ("Carroll at Seven," 21 Jan 1988, in Meadows and Oldham 1991, 33)

However, when Papua New Guineans in Kieta, Toniva, and Arawa did eventually take to the streets, evidence that the mainly Papua New Guinean police force had done little to contain the situation appeared only in the provincial press.

I saw two policemen amongst the troublemakers with their thumbs up. . . . On Monday . . . at Arawa . . . police were watching the so-called Highlanders and Sepiks helping themselves from the shops. They didn't arrest any of the troublemakers. What was going on? Were the rampages in Toniva and Arawa encouraged by the police? Were the police one-sided with their wantoks instead of being the middle man to restore law and order? (Letter to the editor, *AB*, 7 Apr 1989)

Allegations such as these prompted the Bougainville provincial assembly to unanimously pass a motion calling for the Papua New Guinean provincial police commander's dismissal. The story was ignored by the national media, which persisted in linking Bougainvilleans per se with disorder. The following week a *Niugini Nius* report managed to shift the blame for the riots back onto the militants, under the headline "Business as usual": "The soldiers are also under orders, because of their experience in jungle fighting, to flush out the militant Bougainvilleans whom they



believe to be largely responsible for the havoc caused around the Arawa townships and outstations" (NN, 30 Mar 1989, 5). In this way press coverage reflected the PNG social context aptly symbolized by the national flag—a red half dominating a black half, with only a patch of gold in common (Nash and Ogan 1990).

## DIRECT INTERVENTION IN THE MEDIA

Though the media, in fact, reflected a Papua New Guinean bias through the mechanisms discussed, the lack of provable successes on Bougainville panicked the PNG government into attempting more direct control, a tactic common in situations where the political leadership fails to meet set goals (Curry 1982). Censorship surfaced, in the form of denying access to information, after the initial clash between rebels and police at Kongara, three months into the insurgency. Police officials would "neither deny nor confirm the report. It is understood they later instructed their officers not to talk to members of the press or even to put telephone calls through to them" (PNGPC, 1 Feb 1989, 2).

This had the immediate and, in terms of government goals, dysfunctional effect of forcing the media to physically go to Bougainville to research their stories. This arguably resulted in *increased* coverage, as journalists were able to develop contacts with the BRA more readily, and editors devoted more space to crisis coverage in order to rationalize travel expenses. More important, it *antagonized* the media, forcing them into an adversarial role in defense of their professional integrity.

This was expressed clearly a short time later when the government banned foreign news reporters from traveling to Bougainville. Page one stories in the newspapers trumpeted the 21 March Cabinet decision, made ostensibly on the grounds of not being able to guarantee their "safety" (PNGPC, 28, 30 Mar 1989; AB, 31 Mar 1989). Reports detailed how armed police on Bougainville stopped aircraft from carrying a television crew for Australia's Seven Network and attempted to confiscate their tapes. When this failed, the crew were told they would be met in Port Moresby by the National Intelligence Organisation, with the tapes to be vetted then. Photographs of the Seven Network crew, and of Australian Broadcasting Corporation Resident Correspondent Sean Dorney who was also asked to leave the island, accompanied these reports. They were followed by coverage of statements by leaders opposed to the ban, and news of a further

blackout on an upcoming joint police and army operation (NN, 30 Mar 1989; PNGPC, 6 Apr 1989).

In contrast, the BRA appeared to realize that censorship tops any editor's list of newsworthy topics. "Keep talking to the radio and newsmen" Ona urged his sister in a letter subsequently published in the *Post-Courier* (28 Apr 1989). But while the BRA wisely avoided direct confrontation with the media themselves, it attempted to intervene in the process through personal threats directed at high profile public servants involved in crisis management. "We warn you not to speak against our proposal of secession move, no more media broadcasts by you" (PNGPC, 21 Apr 1989, 12). Terrorism of this sort is also recognized as priority copy by the media, and run as such.

The government became highly critical of the press when attempts to control it only backfired. Deputy Prime Minister and former Commander of the PNG Defence Force Ted Diro was particularly hostile. At one of the journalist association's "Club Spik Isi" sessions, he called the [*Niugini Nius*] headline "Wanted: dead or alive" "irresponsible and cheap," adding that it was the creation of the newspaper and not the phrasing of the press release. He deplored "those who sought to gain cheap notoriety by leaking privileged information," and questioned "the ethics of the publishers who make use of such material in a sensitive situation such as Bougainville" (TPNG, 28 Sept–4 Oct 1989, 4).

Diro also carpeted an experienced *Times* journalist over her report on the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre," in which a Methodist pastor and five of his parishioners allegedly were executed by the PNG Defence Force, which then dumped their bodies into the sea from an Australian Defence Force-supplied helicopter. "When we published the story, Diro called asking me to go and meet him. So I went with our general manager and he [Diro] explained to me that what I had written was all nonsense and that I wanted to make a name for myself" ("Dateline," 21 June 1990). The massacre was later verified by Colonel Leo Nuia, commander of the security forces on Bougainville at the time, on an Australian Broadcasting Corporation "Four Corners" report (24 June 1991). Nuia was subsequently sacked, and, in a news year dominated by secessionist movements in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, that show won the Australian 1991 Walkley award for best television investigative report.

Diro is not the only man with a military background to display enmity toward members of the media. An analysis of US wartime media-military

relations since World War II describes an inbuilt “cultural conflict” between journalists and the military: “The military culture, with its accent on conformity, control, discipline, accountability, group loyalty, and cohesion, finds itself in wartime up against a group that is individualistic, competitive, word-conscious, impatient, lacking internal ‘rules’ or ‘standards,’ varied in its needs, suspicious of authority and hard-pressed by deadlines” (Braestrup 1985, 141).

On Bougainville, this cultural conflict occasionally escalated into violence. In late March 1988, the *Arawa Bulletin* offices were occupied and the staff threatened by heavily armed security forces seeking a particular reporter who had met and interviewed BRA Defence Force Commander Sam Kauona. Six weeks later the reporter concerned was assaulted by police and kept overnight in jail for “curfew violations” when he attempted to interview victims of a police raid at Arawa General Hospital (AB, 12 May 1989). Two NBC employees were also assaulted by security forces one morning in April while they were on their way to work. Back in Port Moresby, the *Times* journalist quoted earlier was hauled before the National Intelligence Agency and accused of disloyalty, along with being subjected to anonymous death threats and repeated break-ins (“Dateline,” 1990). These attacks, widely reported, did little to endear the media to the national government cause.

A concern for control over public opinion also led the government to extend the concept of radio awareness campaigns to include disinformation. In the letter to his sister quoted before, Ona warned his supporters that “the report over the radio that we are smuggling guns is not true. It is only a campaign by the Government to get Australian assistance. Don’t believe what is said over the radio by the Government” (PNGPC, 28 Apr 1989). Although Ona was hardly an impartial observer, a British anthropologist visiting relatives in the Tinuputz area in January 1990 also wrote of listening to “fantasy-like pronouncements of Police Commissioner Tohian on the radio about the situation being under control” (Spriggs 1990, 30). These campaigns reached their height during the blockade, when the province was theoretically shut off from all contact with the rest of the country. A defense intelligence report published in late April 1990 had specifically recommended that, in addition to cutting off shipping, “a psychological warfare effort must go into action to exploit the situation” (“Dateline,” 21 June 1990). NBC radio broadcasts continued to be received in many parts of the island and a cocoa farmer resident in the north wrote:

During this time, as we sat in fear and isolation, we were bombarded with government bullshit—half truths, one-sided viewpoints and straight out lies coming through the NBC here. The more I heard the more frustrated I got. . . . It became just a govt. propaganda machine and that was responsible for a lot of angry feeling on B'ville. (Personal letter to author, 13 June 1991)

This "Radio Free Papua New Guinea" strategy was reinforced by a blockade of information coming *from* Bougainville, effectively censoring any further pro-BRA news in the national media. Ironically, military strategists Schelling (1966) and Halperin (1966) identify this kind of *noncommunication* as also part of the process of influence. "Influence uses threat, intimidation . . . and silence in an effort to change the behavior of an opponent by building an *appearance* [original emphasis] of inequality. Whereas the nation that is strong will simply take, a relative equal resorts to influence. . . . Even in war such communication exists" (Starosta 1976, 322).

Coupled with a desire to prevent "ethnic nationalism" from further feeding "on its own publicity" (Griffin 1990, 2), the national government strove to limit evidence that Bougainville could exist as an autonomous political or economic entity. One example concerns the rise in the influence of traditional chiefs, and a devolution of power to their local authority. Though this had been initiated by Kabui's government prior to the conflict, the power vacuum left by the national government's withdrawal of personnel and services accelerated the process. Sources indicate these chiefs, representing many of the values enshrined in BRA ideology and long marginalized by the Western political system, held enough respect among the differing political factions, first, to bring Bougainvillean society back to some semblance of order, and, second, to provide the mechanism necessary for a negotiated peace. The rest of the country, however, was left with the image that suited the government agenda—a province in the grips of anarchy. If, indeed, one of the stated functions of the media in Papua New Guinea is to "dispel fear" (IRC, 1979, 9), these peaceful developments should have been more widely reported.<sup>16</sup> That they were not is consistent with national government disapproval of any information that might legitimize social and political change on Bougainville.

### NEGLECTED THEMES

Institutional bias is also reflected in the apparent consensus throughout the media *not* to report certain issues or events, newsworthy though they may be in the "objective" sense. For instance, there is the curious absence

of any real investigation into why the Bougainville Copper Agreement (BCA) reviews were never carried out. Early on, the topic was approached briefly from the point of personalities. In one report, former Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan outlined his government's 1981 four-part BCA revenue package, rejected at that time by the province, and said political rival and current Minister for Provincial Affairs Father John Momis should "carry the bulk of the blame" (*PNGPC*, 23 Jan 1989, 2). Though Momis responded with accusations of his own, the general feeling among national, provincial, and local government leaders was to get on with the job of finding a solution. Former diplomat Sir Paulius Matane explicated this very clearly: "I would suggest we not blame anybody. I don't believe in passing the buck, but in taking the yoke and shouldering it" (*TPNG*, 13-19 Apr 1989, 6). BCL, and sections of the new PLA leadership happy with the progress made in negotiations at that time, concurred.

Yet, the way journalists shied away from any in-depth investigation indicates many of the participants in the review process continue to wield influence. Every reporter knows it is not good practice to unnecessarily antagonize one's sources, yet it is also important to clarify how issues such as taxation, the further devolution of financial powers to the province, or the lifting of the prospecting moratorium may have hindered the resolution of problems at an earlier stage. Central to these issues is the tension between Melanesian common law understandings of mineral ownership and Australian law accepted at the time of independence. As far as journalists are concerned, these issues will not go away simply because it is inconvenient to write about them. Landowners are becoming increasingly involved in the direct negotiation of mineral compensation packages, and, in line with government communication policy recommendations in the past, it is the role of the media to inform them of the political and economic situations they may have to face (*IRC* 1979).

Related to the selective amnesia over the BCA is the lack of any follow-up as to why underdevelopment was allowed to persist so long in the relocated villages. Again, the magnitude of this oversight renders it an enormously sensitive area. Tangential references to "lessons learned" have avoided reports degenerating into a messy and counterproductive debate over who defaulted in which responsibility. But the important question, *why*, remains unexplored. Its absence from coverage compromises one of the most widely agreed on responsibilities of the press in Papua New Guinea—to explain government policies to the people.

The historical aspect of the BRA as an organization is another signifi-

cant gap in coverage. Most of the background features focused on the exclusion of the female landowners in the original negotiations, and in the generational friction in the mine site area, effectively containing the "cause" of the crisis within a very limited context. Very little attention has been paid to developments in what former Premier Leo Hannett calls provincial "party politics" during the 1980s (Hannett 1989).<sup>17</sup> More than a simple flowering in expectation as a result of 1987 election campaign rhetoric, the decade was characterized by an increasing, and provincewide, ideological schism between those who favored the Hannett administration's model of development corporation capitalism and those who preached the Melanesian Alliance emphasis on distributive participation. Hannett fought the Melanesian Alliance on the rationale that the province must stand united in negotiations with the national government and was chagrined when the party established "firm roots at the grassroot level" (*ibid.*). Those roots eventually grew into a sizable enough voting bloc over such issues as the proposed Laluai River hydroelectric scheme to unseat him as premier in the 1984 election. A number of rank-and-file campaigners for the Melanesian Alliance in that election, who apparently later became disenchanted with the refusal of the party to embrace secessionism, have since turned up in the BRA hierarchy. Their persistence in the pursuit of political power should signal a warning to those who believe "the Bougainville problem" will be solved simply through the assassination or arrest of the more prominent BRA ideologues such as Ona or Kauona.

## CONCLUSION

The struggle over public opinion in the Papua New Guinea press was fiercely fought, but with limited success. For the most part, the crisis was reported through Papua New Guinean, not Bougainvillean, eyes. Nationalist ideology—exacerbated by institutional, organizational, and functional influences on the centralized Port Moresby media—resulted in the portrayal of the BRA as anarchists and traitors. Bougainvilleans effectively became "fuzzy-wuzzy devils"—in contrast to the "fuzzy-wuzzy angel" stereotype of Papua New Guineans constructed in the postwar Australian press (Nelson 1974, 86). When ethnic violence flared during the crisis, coverage of this ilk only inflamed shallowly concealed antipathies. These antipathies deepened through firsthand experience with security force

abuses and were shared through the informal communication networks that have influenced public opinion in Melanesian communities for centuries. The power of these networks should not be underestimated. Though mass media can and do play a number of roles in Papua New Guinean society, Bougainville crisis coverage has clearly highlighted the inadequacy of government communication policies that patronize the natural intelligence of grass-roots people.

## Notes

1 "Lately, the name Francis Ona appears constantly in the newspapers, radio and television of this country of ours, PNG, as well as those of the world. Few people had heard of Francis Ona before, but now in PNG every man, woman and child—even the aged and the blind—all know his name."

2 This is the second so-named constitutional emergency to be faced by Papua New Guinea. The first occurred in the early 1970s and highlighted deficiencies in communication policy similar to those experienced in the current crisis. "[I]t was no coincidence that the decision to exclude provincial government from the Constitution was made immediately after the major breakdown in negotiations with Bougainville. Because of this breakdown in communication between the two governments, the central government did not fully understand the reasons for the Bougainville crisis. Consequently . . . the government's reasoning was based to some extent on a misinterpretation of facts" (Conyers 1976, 65).

3 To distinguish them from the "old" PLA, which signed the 1980 "minor" compensation agreement with BCL. Originally, a BCL watchdog and forum for landowner interests, decisions taken by executives of the old PLA and its investment arm, the Road Mine Tailings Lease Trust Fund (RMTLTF), were increasingly criticized by landowners in the mine site area as being pro-BCL (Okole 1990). Rising discontent existed also over the distribution of compensation payments: "Last year, RMTL gave K99,000 to the beneficiaries of which K54,000 was paid to all committee members of the Panguna Landowners Association. The payment is for services rendered in negotiating compensation payments with BCL in the early days" (AB, 6 May 1988). One kina equals about one American dollar.

4 See Conyers 1976, Griffin 1990, Griffin and Kawona 1989, Hannett 1975, Havini 1990, Laracy 1976, Mamak and Bedford 1974, May 1982, Momis and Ogan 1972, Ogan 1990, Oliver 1973, Ryan 1969, Worsley 1957.

5 Ten newsletters, some of them quite lively, were being published more or less regularly by provincial governments at the time of my 1989 survey of the PNG



press (Layton 1990). All, however, strongly reflected government patronage in their copy.

6 North Solomons ranked twelfth out of twenty in the study, which was conducted in late August and early September 1988. During this period the new PLA attempted to break the four-month stalemate in negotiations with BCL and the national government by occupying the RMTLTF offices run by the old PLA, generating a great deal of copy in the *Arawa Bulletin*.

7 Seventy-seven percent of independent newspaper journalists and 41 percent of government information officers (Henshall 1989).

8 The *Post-Courier* now publishes a sixteen-page four-color insert titled *Provincial News* and encourages readers from all over the country to submit articles.

9 Dr Luke Rovin and teacher Peter Moini, both Bougainvilleans, were killed by Highlanders following a road accident in Goroka in which a young Highland girl died.

10 "Relatively educated Bougainville men began talking about it openly in 1958. . . . Albert Maori Kiki, at Buka Passage in 1962 as a government welfare officer, told in 1968 how a Bougainville man's petition for his island's independence was taken by government officers before he could present it to Sir Hugh Foot's United Nations Visiting Mission" (Ryan 1969, 335).

11 "It is often believed that the Bougainvilleans' attempt to secede has been motivated primarily by their selfish desire to receive all the profits from the copper mine at Panguna" (Conyers 1976, 52).

12 Landowner, former radio announcer, and Ona's first cousin (*PNGPC*, 27 Jan 1989).

13 In March 1988 Premier Joseph Kabui called in national police to conduct this special operation in an effort to curb rising criminal gang activity or "rascalism." Though hundreds of arrests were made, most were for traffic, not criminal, offenses.

14 The month after the new PLA was elected.

15 The fact that an Ampaoi youth in particular was leading a rascal gang complicates the neat generational dichotomy set up in national media reports on the PLA-RMTLTF leadership struggle, which did not reflect the considerable power and personal wealth amassed by the old board and their families. This board had been chaired by Ampaoi Senior since its inception in 1981, though original terms stipulated annual elections. After the RMTLTF headquarters were occupied by the new PLA, Ampaoi was pressured by the provincial government to announce new elections at the next RMTLTF annual general meeting, set for April 1989 (*AB*, 26 Aug 1988). Apparently this was not soon enough for the new PLA, and much Ampaoi family property was destroyed in the early arson attacks. The "payback" underscores both the political aspects of rascal-BRA rivalry and the obstacles Ona faced in controlling rascal activities, even within his own area.



16 The *Times* did carry some coverage of an effort by traditional leaders to mediate in a dispute over canoe traffic between Bougainville and the Shortland Islands (TPNG, 29 Nov 90, 4).

17 See Griffin and Kawona 1989.

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